Small Entity Compliance Guide

Dear Recreational Vessel Owner:

This is to inform you that the Secretary of Commerce has approved an interim final rule to implement restrictions under the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan for the start of the May 1, 2002, fishing year*. This rule reduces overfishing on Northeast groundfish stocks through measures that include an extension of existing area closures, new area closures, new gear restrictions, days-at-sea restrictions, and more restrictive recreational fishing measures.

These measures are effective from May 1, 2002, through July 31, 2002, unless otherwise noted. Following is a summary of the recreational management measures that will be implemented under this interim final rule. All recreational management measures under the Northeast Multispecies FMP not changed or modified by this rule remain in effect.

Due to the recent groundfish case (Conservation Law Foundation, et al., v. Evans, these measures could change pending a Court decision expected by April 26, 2002. The National Marine Fisheries Service will immediately inform the public of any such change through a NOAA Weather Radio/Coast Guard Radio notice and through a posting on the Northeast Regional Office's web page at: http://www.wh.whoi.edu/ro/doc/nero.html.

RECREATIONAL AND CHARTER/PARTY VESSEL RESTRICTIONS

Minimum fish size increase (private charter/party vessels)

This action increases the minimum length for cod retained by federally permitted charter/party vessels, and private recreational vessels not holding a Federal permit and fishing in the EEZ, to 23 inches from the current size limit of 21 inches.

Possession limit (charter/party vessels)

This action implements a cod and haddock bag (possession) limit for the charter/party recreational fishing sector when fishing any part of a trip in the GOM RMA. Each person on a charter/party vessel will be allowed to possess no more than 10 cod or haddock, combined, per trip. The current per person bag limit for private recreational vessels of 10 cod and/or haddock, combined, when fishing anywhere within the EEZ

remains unchanged (as do all other recreational restrictions not changed by this interim action).

GOM closed area authorization to fish (charter/party vessels)

The regulations currently prohibit a vessel fishing under the charter/party regulations, from fishing in the GOM closure areas unless the vessel has on board a letter of authorization (LOA) issued by the Regional Administrator. This LOA is currently valid for a period of 3 months and exempts the charter/party vessel from the GOM closure areas, provided the vessel does not fish under a multispecies DAS (and does not sell fish) during the time of the authorization. Under this interim action, charter/party vessels are required to obtain an LOA for the full span of this interim final rule in order to fish as a charter/party vessel in the GOM closure areas.

LOAs issued to vessels before May 1, 2002, and which would expire prior to the expiration of this interim action, will automatically be canceled on May 15, 2002. Vessels wanting to obtain an LOA for the entire duration of this interim action will need to obtain a new LOA by May 15, 2002, by calling the NMFS Permit Office at 978-281-9370.

Charter/party and private recreational fishing measures.

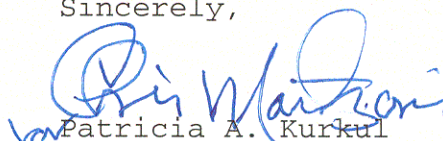|	Minimum Fish Size, Inches (cod only)[1]	Bag Limit (combined)	Closure Exemption Authorization
Charter/party	23	10 cod/haddock[2]	Duration of interim action
Private Recreational	23	10 cod/haddock	N/A

[1] All other minimum fish sizes remain unchanged.
[2] When fishing in the GOM RMA.

This letter is only a summary of the regulations that have been implemented. To read these regulations in their entirety, you are encouraged to obtain a complete copy by calling (978) 281-9278, or by accessing the Northeast Regional Office's web page at: http://www.wh.whoi.edu/ro/doc/nero.html

This Small Entity Compliance Guide complies with section 212 of the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement and Fairness Act of 1996.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Kurkul
Regional Administrator